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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 002359

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [BR](#) [EC](#) [CO](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: URIBE AUTHORIZES CORDOBA PARTICIPATION, OPENS DOOR  
FOR HOSTAGE RELEASES

REF: A. BOGOTA 1374  
[1](#)B. BOGOTA 1338  
[1](#)C. BOGOTA 0319

Classified By: DCM Brian A. Nichols, Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) President Uribe reversed his previous position and announced on July 8 that Senator Piedad Cordoba was authorized to participate in Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) hostage releases, with the stipulation that the FARC's remaining 24 uniformed hostages be released simultaneously. Representatives of the Catholic Church met with Peace Commissioner Frank Pearl the night before the announcement and requested the policy change. Immediately after the announcement, Father Dario Echeverri received information from an intermediary that the FARC would accept the conditions but had added impossible demands that the Government of Colombia (GOC) recognize the existence of an armed conflict and the FARC as a legitimate belligerent. Cordoba later publicly claimed she had requested a meeting with President Uribe to discuss her participation, but Pearl told us she had submitted no such request and that the fabrication was typical of Cordoba. Meanwhile, the Church continues its efforts to mediate, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) plans to stay above the fray until its logistical assistance is required. End Summary.

GOC AUTHORIZES CORDOBA PARTICIPATION

[1](#)2. (U) In a press conference on July 8, President Uribe announced that Senator Piedad Cordoba was authorized to participate in hostage releases, adding that the FARC must immediately release all remaining 24 uniformed hostages along with the remains of three other hostages who died in FARC custody. The GOC later defined "simultaneous" to mean a consolidated decision to release the 24 in a specified period of time, and clarified that Cordoba's authorization only allowed her to be present at hostage releases--not to mediate. The announcement was surprising because of Uribe's prior insistence that only the ICRC and the Catholic Church were authorized to facilitate such releases (reftel A). Cordoba's participation has been a key demand of the FARC in order to continue with their announced release of soldiers Pablo Moncayo (held since December 1997) and Josue Calvo (held since April of this year).

13. (C) Father Dario Echeverri of the National Conciliation Commission told us on July 16 that representatives of the Commission had met with Peace Commissioner Frank Pearl the night before Uribe's announcement and requested Cordoba's participation, believing the FARC would not engage without it. According to Echeverri, the GOC agreed to the request because the "drip" of hostage releases had become the real problem--not Cordoba. Pearl told us separately the GOC was open to contributions from anyone who could help and that the GOC had decided to give Cordoba another chance.

#### POSSIBLE FARC COUNTER DEMANDS NON-STARTERS

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14. (C) Echeverri noted that he had received a call hours after Uribe's announcement from Henry Acosta, a politician with FARC contacts. Acosta told Echeverri that the FARC would accept the conditions if the GOC would recognize the existence of an armed conflict and the FARC as a legitimate belligerent. Echeverri said he told Acosta that the first condition may be workable because it was more of a technical issue, but that the second condition would be impossible and would "shut the door" on any progress. These conditions have not been made public.

#### PUBLIC POSITIONING CONTINUES

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15. (U) On July 20, the FARC Central Staff Secretariat posted a letter to Cordoba dated July 19 on ANNCOL (a website regularly used by the FARC to publish communiques) welcoming her participation in receiving the hostages when the time

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came and saying they were waiting for further information from the President detailing logistical considerations for a "humanitarian exchange" of prisoners. The letter also stated that the FARC would begin preparations to release Pablo Moncayo, Josue Calvo, and the remains of others. The President's press secretary told the media that the Church, ICRC, and Cordoba remained authorized to participate in "liberating" the hostages, and he reiterated the government's call for the release of all 24 uniformed hostages. After a meeting with Church leaders on July 20, Cordoba announced that she had not met with the FARC, but that she had received word that proof of life evidence for unnamed hostages was en route.

#### VIEWS FROM THE CORDOBA CAMP

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16. (C) Alberto Cienfuegos, a key Cordoba advisor and member of Colombians for Peace (CFP), told us that he believed a release could happen rapidly but that logistics remained a challenge. The FARC only has confidence in the participation of the governments of Venezuela and Brazil--in that order. He noted that the FARC nearly aborted the last hostage release because of the GOC monitoring flights. Furthermore, communications between CFP and the FARC have dramatically slowed, according to Cienfuegos, since the deaths of Ivan Rios, Raul Reyes, and Manuel Marulanda last year. Cienfuegos said his group communicates effectively to the FARC through the media and used to expect replies in as little as two weeks. Responses from the insurgents now take as long as six months.

17. (C) Cienfuegos told us he believes the announcement was not spontaneous and that Uribe had been "cooking" it up for some time. He argued that there are four reasons behind the Uribe announcement. First, Uribe is trying to avoid a debate on "war and peace" and the legitimacy of the Democratic Security policy. Second, Uribe took the "pulse of Congress" and realized that he needed to strengthen his support ahead of upcoming debates about the reelection referendum and recent political scandals. Third, Cienfuegos claims that the FARC were considering releasing hostages to the Government of Ecuador. Fourth, Cienfuegos said Uribe was feeling the pressure of international opinion, particularly from other

Latin American nations where Cordoba has been "received like a head of state."

CORDOBA MEETING REQUESTS ONLY MEDIA POSTURING

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¶18. (C) For her part, Cordoba told the press shortly after the July 8 announcement that she had requested a meeting with President Uribe to discuss hostage releases and other issues.

She continued her media campaign a week later, stating that a total of five hostages could be released within a month, but that she wanted to discuss the possibility with Uribe. Commissioner Pearl told us that the GOC had not received any requests for meetings from Cordoba, adding that "she is not telling the truth," which he characterized as typical of her.

He also stated that he saw no value in the GOC speaking with Cordoba, and that he had directed the Church to speak with her when necessary.

¶19. (C) Aldo Civico (protect), from Columbia University's Center for International Conflict Resolution, told us that Cordoba was not a bridge, but rather an obstacle to the long-term peace process. She is using her participation as an instrument for opposition. Civico added that if she had respected the mechanism, it could have been used for a broader humanitarian accord, but that was now not possible.

¶10. (C) Still, both CFP and the Church expect Pearl will eventually speak with Cordoba on the issue. Cienfuegos told us he believes that Pearl will meet with her to try to convince her that she should not act as a mediator. He said that Cordoba and CFP will not react in a confrontational manner but will be "very serene." Echeverri also expects a Pearl-Cordoba meeting, but pointed out that the Church does not want Uribe himself to meet with the Senator because it would be politically risky for him. ICRC Delegation Head Christophe Beney told us on July 21 that he had already recently tried to bring Pearl and Cordoba to the

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table--without success.

CHURCH EFFORTS CONTINUE, BUT RED CROSS WARY

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¶11. (C) Echeverri told us the Church has offered Vatican involvement in the peace process. He said that the Vatican would play a more political role than the humanitarian one currently held by the Colombian Church and could step in when appropriate. The Church has also been trying to get a message concerning Church mediation to the FARC's leadership, but has gotten no response. Echeverri told us that Church has had problems in recent months receiving timely responses from the FARC for unknown reasons. He is now planning a personal mission to deliver the message to the two FARC leaders, but fears he may be wasting time and resources without advance confirmation they will receive him.

¶12. (C) The ICRC's Beney told us that the ICRC will not mediate negotiations concerning the conditions of hostage releases. He reiterated his point from April (reftel B) that both sides are playing games and that the process has become too politicized for the ICRC to intervene. When appropriate, the ICRC is prepared to provide logistical support, as it did in collaboration with the Brazilians in the February hostage releases. Beney also noted that the February release showed that the ICRC had recovered some trust after Operation Jaque (reftel C). Still, the group does not have contact with the FARC Secretariat, and contact with many regional and local FARC leaders remains tenuous.

Brownfield